

Testing the Ice: A True Story About Jackie Robinson

by Sharon Robinson

Sharon Robinson, the daughter of baseball legend Jackie Robinson, crafts a heartwarming, true story about growing up with her father.

When Jackie Robinson retires from baseball and moves his family to Connecticut, the beautiful lake on their property is the center of everyone’s fun. The neighborhood children join the Robinson kids for swimming and boating. But oddly, Jackie never goes near the water. In a dramatic episode that first winter, the children beg to go ice skating on the lake. Jackie says they can go—but only after he tests the ice to declare it is safe!

Create Successful Reading Habits

Current research from the What Works Clearinghouse shows the importance of explicitly teaching academic language skills.* Students typically develop social language skills naturally. Those are the language skills used to communicate informally with family and friends. Developing academic language skills, however, usually requires instruction. By guiding students to develop their academic language skills, teachers can mitigate some of the challenges that students encounter when learning to comprehend text.

After introducing students to new words, encourage deeper understanding by providing extended opportunities for them to use and discuss the words. Activities that support deeper understanding allow students to

- make connections between a new vocabulary word and other known words.
- relate the word to their own experiences.
- differentiate between correct and incorrect uses of the word.
- generate and answer questions that include the word.

* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, What Works Clearinghouse. (n.d.). Practice Guides. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuides>

SCIENCE OF READING – EXPLICIT AND SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

Effective reading instruction is systematic, explicit, and scaffolded; it provides multiple examples and opportunities for students to practice the skill or concept being taught.

Systematic instruction is ...

- thoughtfully outlined, builds upon prior learning, and is delivered on a continuum from simple to complex skills.
- broken down into manageable step-by-step chunks that are appropriate to the instructional goals and pacing of instruction.
- a carefully planned scope and sequence of instruction.

The goal of **systematic instruction** is to ensure that whenever students are asked to learn a new skill or concept, they already possess the appropriate knowledge and understanding to efficiently learn the new skill or concept.

Explicit instruction is ...

- making the skill taught obvious to the student.
- scaffolded and typically follows the “I Do, We Do, You Do” instructional routine.
- an instructional routine that gradually shifts the responsibility from the teacher to the student.

The following scaffolding should occur during explicit instruction:

1. **I Do:** The teacher explains and models the skill or concept by showing exactly how to do what was explained. The teacher should provide multiple examples and, when appropriate, nonexamples.
2. **We Do:** The teacher provides guided practice with scaffolding. The teacher monitors and scaffolds instruction by prompting and giving corrective feedback as students practice the skill or concept with the teacher or a peer.
3. **You Do:** The teacher provides independent practice. Students practice the skill or concept independently while the teacher monitors and gives feedback.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT FLORIDA’S B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

The B.E.S.T. standards include an appendix for each of the five strands: ELA Expectations, Foundations, Reading, Communication, and Vocabulary. Each appendix contains additional resources that should be used to help you implement high-quality, rigorous instruction around complex grade-level texts. These resources can help ensure that you are teaching the depth and breadth of each benchmark.

WORD WORK – MULTISYLLABIC WORDS WITH R-CONTROLLED SYLLABLES

Help your students recognize **r-controlled syllables** to decode and read unknown multisyllabic words.

When the letter *r* follows a vowel (*a, e, i, o, u*) in a syllable, it becomes an **r-controlled syllable**. In *r*-controlled syllables, the vowel is controlled by the letter *r*, and the vowel sound is neither long nor short. *R*-controlled vowels make a single sound. For example:

- **/er/, /ir/, and /ur/** are pronounced with the same single sound as in **bird**, **fern**, and **turn** with a few exceptions, like when a word starts with **/ir/** as in **irritate**.
- **/or/** is pronounced with its own single sound, like in **corn**.
- **/ar/** is pronounced with its own single sound, like in **smart**.

Here is an example of how to talk about *r*-controlled syllables, using words from the book.

A - **dor** - ing - ly (p. 12)

- Point to the word *adoringly*.
- Say, "The word is *adoringly*. It has four syllables: *a - dor - ing - ly*."
- Point to the syllable that has the *r*-controlled vowel. (*dor*)
- Say, "In this syllable, the vowel *o* is followed by the letter *r*. That makes it an *r*-controlled vowel, so the sound is */or/*."
- Ask your students to repeat the sound for the *r*-controlled vowel. (*/or/*)
- Say, "Blend the *r*-controlled vowel with the other letters in that syllable, */d/ + /or/ = /dor/*."
- Say, "Now, blend the *r*-controlled syllable (*dor*) with the first syllable (*a*), which makes the 'uh' */ə/* sound." */ə/ + /d/ + /or/ = /ə dor/*
- Say, "The last two syllables have endings that are familiar to us: *-ing* and *-ly*. If we blend all the syllables together *a - dor - ing - ly*, the word is *adoringly*."
- Ask, "What is the word?" (*adoringly*)

Find other examples of multisyllabic *r*-controlled syllables in the book for more opportunities to practice.

ELA.5.F.1.3: Use knowledge of grade-appropriate phonics and word-analysis skills to decode words.

- Apply knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology to read and write unfamiliar single-syllable and multisyllabic words in and out of context.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

Use a decodable text with *r*-controlled vowels as a way to provide students with additional opportunities to practice this skill. Decodable text incorporates words with letter-sound relationships that can be used to reinforce what has already been taught.

TALK ABOUT NEW AND INTERESTING WORDS

Tier 2 vocabulary words can be used for explicit vocabulary instruction. When teaching vocabulary, it is important to create and share student-friendly definitions that are appropriate for the level of your students. Help students make connections to the word by providing contextual information that relates to the text being read and builds upon their background knowledge. Here are some examples of Tier 2 vocabulary words from the book:

fuss (p. 10) **adoringly** (p. 10) **approached** (p. 14) **startled** (p. 14)

Connotation & Denotation:

- **Denotation** is the definition of a word.
- **Connotation** is an emotion or idea that is associated with a word in addition to the actual meaning. Words can have either a positive or a negative connotation, which evokes a positive or negative feeling within the reader.
- Words with the same denotation can have different connotations.

The story *Testing the Ice: A True Story about Jackie Robinson* uses many words with different connotations. Identify words in the text that have a positive or negative connotation. Then allow students to look up the definition of the word, compare the definition of the word to its use in context, and determine the connotation of the word in context. Use the following example from the text:

Introduce the word **beat** to students.

- Tell students that the denotation, or definition, of the word *beat* means to hit something really hard or defeat someone or something.
- Explain that **beat** is a multiple-meaning word and can have different connotations or feelings based on how it is used in the sentence. If someone is getting beat up, then *beat* has a negative connotation. But if I say that someone beat a world record, then the word *beat* has a positive connotation.
- Read the sentence on page 2, and determine if the word *beat* has a positive or negative connotation based on the context of the story.
 - Sentence: "It took seven games, but the Brooklyn Dodgers finally **beat** the New York Yankees!"
- Ask students to think about the definition of the word **beat** and how it is being used in this sentence, and determine if it has a positive or negative connotation.

Continue to identify the denotation and connotation of words as you read the text.

ELA.5.V.1.3: Use context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the meaning of multiple-meaning and unknown words and phrases, appropriate to grade level.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

Use a graphic organizer to help facilitate this learning by having students write down the definition of the word and then placing either a + or - in the box to represent the type of connotation the word has in the text. Pre-identify words **in the text** for students to examine more closely as they read.

Word	Denotation (Definition)	Positive	Negative
Beat (p. 2)	to hit something really hard or defeat someone or something	+	
Shouted (p. 16)			
Shouted (p. 26)			

READING FOR MEANING – NARRATIVE PLOT DEVELOPMENT

- ELA.5.R.1.1: Analyze how setting, events, conflict, and characterization contribute to the plot in a literary text.
- ELA.5.C.1.2: Write personal or fictional narratives using a logical sequence of events and demonstrating an effective use of techniques, such as dialogue, description, and transitional words and phrases.
 - Clarification 1: See Writing Types.
- ELA.5.R.3.2: Summarize a text to enhance comprehension.

Testing the Ice: A True Story about Jackie Robinson is a narrative nonfiction text and can be used as a mentor text for learning how to write a personal narrative. Authors incorporate literary elements and narrative techniques to tell a story, deliver content, or convey a message to their readers. You can learn about the different narrative techniques on page 184 of the B.E.S.T. standards.

Before:

- Introduce the text *Testing the Ice: A True Story about Jackie Robinson*.
- Activate your students' background knowledge by having conversations about what they know about baseball, Jackie Robinson, segregation, and being afraid to try something.
- Explain to students that they will analyze the author's use of literary elements to develop the plot of a personal narrative. After reading, students will complete a narrative pyramid to reflect on key ideas and details. Students will also use a graphic organizer to analyze the author's use of sensory language.

During:

Plot Development Questions:

- What important information do we learn about Jackie Robinson? (p. 1 – 3)
- Why do you think the author decided to start her story with a flashback to this historic event?
- Where does this story take place? How does the family feel about moving to this place? What evidence in the text supports your answer? (p. 5 – 6)
 - What are some major events, like moving, have you and your family experienced?
- Who is the narrator of this story? How do you know? (p. 7)
- What is the problem on page 9?
 - Why do you think Jackie Robinson would never get into the water with his children?
- In the story, the author states, "And while we took it all for granted, our friends made a big fuss over Dad's trophy room." (p. 9)
 - Why do the author's friends "make a fuss" over the trophy room?
 - What does the author mean when she says that she and her siblings took their father's trophy room for granted?
- How does segregation impact baseball in 1945? (p. 11)
 - Why do you think no one expects things to change? (p. 12)
- Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play on a professional baseball team. Why will this be a difficult transition for him? (p. 13)
- Jackie Robinson says, "I thought of the doors opening to other black players after me and how the color barrier of baseball would be shattered."
 - What does he mean when he says "opening doors for other black players?"
 - What is the color barrier? How does he plan on shattering it?
- How does playing for the Dodgers impact Jackie Robinson's life? (p. 18)
- What major event happens in 1956? (p. 19)
 - What does the author love most about her father's retirement?
- What conflict reappears on page 22?
- How does Mr. Robinson respond when his children and their friends ask if they can go ice skating? (p. 26)
- The text says that Jackie Robinson is reluctant to take the children to the icy lake. What does it mean to be reluctant? What does this tell us about his character? (p. 27)
- What does the author realize about her father as he is testing to see if the ice is safe? (p. 32)
- Why does the author believe her father is the bravest man alive? (p. 36)
 - Tell me about a time when you witnessed someone being brave? What were you feeling?
- How does Jackie Robinson show courage by testing the ice and breaking the color barrier in baseball? (p. 38)

After:

Discussion:

- How does Jackie Robins change over the course of the story?
- What events contribute to the change in the character?
- Jackie Robinson changes the world of Major League Baseball for people of color. How else does this hero stand up for change?
- Jackie Robinson overcomes his fears by being brave and having courage. Have you ever overcome a fear? How?

NARRATIVE PYRAMID

Extension Activity: Have students use the narrative pyramid to plan and write their own personal narrative.

- **Line 1:** Write the name of the main character.
- **Line 2:** Describe the character in two words.
- **Line 3:** Students will use three words to describe the setting (or list multiple settings).
- **Line 4:** Explain the main conflict using four words or four different conflicts presented in the text.
- **Line 5 - 7:** Describe three key events of the plot using the corresponding number of words. (line 5 = five words, etc.)
- **Line 8:** Explain the resolution of the conflict in eight words.
- Use the pyramid to write a summary of the text.

ELL and SWD suggestion:

Have students use the narrative pyramid as they read the story to track their thinking and understanding of the text. Try chunking the text into smaller sections of reading so that students can concentrate on interpreting and understanding one event at a time and build on their knowledge as they read.

